

## Obituary

LIEUT.-COL. R. S. P. BATES, I.A., (Retd.)

(With a plate)

It is sad to record the death of Lieut.-Col. R. S. P. ('Pat') Bates, I.A. (Retd.) on 3rd August 1961. He died suddenly of a ruptured aneurysm and aorta in hospital where he was rushed from his home in Thursley, Surrey. Col. Bates joined the Bombay Natural History Society in 1921 and became a Life Member in 1937. Throughout his service in India, and even after retirement and leaving the country in 1947, Col. Bates maintained the closest association with the Society, and was a model of what a really active member should be.

An ardent lover of birds and a knowledgeable and painstaking field ornithologist, he made significant contributions to Indian ornithology as his numerous notes and articles in the *Journal* testify. His love of the Indian countryside and, in particular, his passion for Kashmir and its birds were unquenchable. Many of his leave periods were spent in exploring the various valleys and their bird life, and his descriptions, apart from their fascination, are a useful and valuable guide for the nature-loving visitor to Kashmir.

But perhaps Bates's chief accomplishment and pioneering contribution lies in the field of bird photography in India. Up to the time he published his popular series on 'Bird Nesting with a Camera in India' in the *Journal* (1924), bird photography here was a neglected art. The articles opened up a wide field of interest and possibilities, which were soon taken advantage of and developed by other enthusiastic photographers. Many of his portraits of Indian birds must still rank amongst the finest ever made. And when it is remembered that in those early years cameras, telephoto lenses, and films were far less perfect than today, his achievement seems doubly creditable. That he could attain the perfection many of his photographs show with the apparatus and material his modest means could command was largely due to his ingenuity and skill in improvising and preparing with his own hands simple little gadgets to meet special requirements.

Bates was fortunate to have in India during the same period E. H. N. Lowther, an officer in the then East Indian Railway, also an accomplished field ornithologist and bird photographer. These kindred spirits soon discovered one another and became fast friends till the latter's death in 1954 (Obituary in Vol. 50 : 913). Many of their furloughs were purposely timed so that they could trek and camp together in Kashmir watching and photographing birds. The partnership proved rewarding and is immortalized by *BREEDING BIRDS OF KASHMIR*, a book of great charm and usefulness, every page of which testifies to the devotion, attention to detail, and scientific accuracy both men brought to bear on their study of birds.

Bates kept up his lively interest in birds and bird photography even after retirement in England, though his letters often complained about his circumscribed opportunities as compared with India, and lack of time from the mundane domestic chores that go with house-holding and life in general in the England of today. In spite of all this, however, he managed to keep his interest alive by taking active part in many local natural history societies, having latterly become an ardent convert to trapping and ringing birds. That he also missed no opportunity of indulging in his pet hobby of bird photography, and had lost none of his old cunning through want of practice was evident from the Xmas and New Year cards which his friends unflinchingly received from him, portraying some English bird which had nested in or near his charming garden in Thursley. Gardening was another of Bates's minor passions. A few months before his death he wrote enthusiastically in a letter to me: 'My efforts at turning this garden into a wee bird sanctuary at last seem to be bearing some fruit. We have at last got both Green and Greater Spotted Woodpeckers in it regularly, and the Greater Spotted is at last digging a hole in a poplar stump I specially left standing for its delectation.'

Ever since his retirement, Bates had been dreaming and scheming for one more spell of birding in his beloved Kashmir, but alas it was fated otherwise. A man of gentle, loveable charm and modesty, and peaceful, cultured interests, he used to say that sometimes he was amused to see himself in soldier's uniform when he felt so little warlike within, and so much at peace with the world and all it contained! That he made a very good soldier nevertheless is proved by the high record of his military career. Bates's death is indeed a sad loss for Indian ornithology as it is for his numerous ornithological friends. He was one of the last links in the chain of

distinguished British ornithologists working on Indian birds before the focus shifted lock, stock, and barrel to Africa. To Mrs. Bates, his constant helpmate and collaborator, who shared all his interests and hobbies, in India as in England, we offer our sincerest sympathy.

A list of Col. Bates's contributions to the *Journal* is placed below:

1923	(1) Notes on Hugh Whistler's 'A Contribution to the Ornithology of Cashmere' in Vol. XXVIII, No. 4. . .	29 : 798
1924	(2) Birds' nesting with a camera in India . .	Part I, 29 : 947
	..	Part II, 30 : 97
	..	Part III, 30 : 306
	..	Part IV, 30 : 600
	..	Part V, 30 : 793
	..	Part VI, 31 : 277
1927	(3) Impressions of Pachmarhi birds . .	31 : 918
1929	(4) A Reed-bed in the Dal Lake, Kashmir . .	33 : 656
1931	(5) A note on the nidification and habits of the Travancore Laughing Thrush <i>Trochalopteryx jerdoni fairbanki</i> . .	35 : 204
1932	(6) Migration of Paradise Flycatcher ( <i>Tchitrea paradisi</i> ) . .	35 : 896
1935	(7) Notes on the habits of some Indian birds . .	37 : 902
1935	(8) Some birds of Chittagong . .	38 : 158
1936	(9) On the birds of Kishenganga Valley, Kashmir . .	38 : 520
1937	(10) Do birds employ ants to rid themselves of ectoparasites ? . .	39 : 394
1938	(11) On the parasitic habits of the Pied Crested Cuckoo ( <i>Clamator jacobinus</i> Bodd.) . .	40 : 125
1938	(12) Rosefinches and other birds of the Wardwan Valley . .	40 : 183
1939	(13) Bird photography in India . .	40 : 666
1942	(14) A month in the Kazinag Range . .	43 : 60
1942	(15) Extension of the Range of the Atlas Beetle ( <i>Chalcosoma atlas</i> ) . .	43 : 274
1943	(16) A note on the Feeding Habits of the Little Bittern ( <i>Ixobrychus minutus</i> ) . .	44 : 179
1948	(17) Astanmarg . .	48 : 38
1949	(18) The Merbal Glen and some birds of the Pir Panjal . .	48 : 399

1949	(19) Peculiar Behaviour of the Darter ( <i>Anhinga melanogaster</i> Pennant) ..	48 : 810
1950	(20) The lower Sind Valley, and some further observations on bird photography ..	49 : 178
1952	(21) (with E. H. N. Lowther) The History of Bird-Photography in India ..	50 : 779
1952	(22) Possible association between the Yellow- naped Woodpecker ( <i>Picus flavinucha</i> ) and the Large Racket-tailed Drongo ( <i>Dissemurus paradiseus</i> ) ..	50 : 941
1955	(23) Monkeys and Panther ..	53 : 254
1956	(24) Fighting among Birds ..	54 : 191
1959	(25) Communal nest feeding in Babblers ..	56 : 630

Besides he was the author of a book BIRD LIFE IN INDIA published by the Bombay Natural History Society in 1931 (now out of print) and, jointly with E. H. N. Lowther of another entitled BREEDING BIRDS OF KASHMIR published by the Oxford University Press, 1952.

S. A.